

# Social Marketing

## How Outreach and Behavior Change Strategies can Help you Achieve Your Water Quality Goals

### Behavior Change Outreach and Watershed Management

Anytime a person chooses to adopt a best management practice that may result in improved watershed conditions, outreach was involved.

Outreach can be as simple as one activity designed to raise awareness about an issue. It can also be as complex as developing and implementing an integrated strategy to go beyond awareness and education to promoting sustained behavior change.

While general awareness about watershed issues is still somewhat low throughout the country, and awareness campaigns are still important, efforts designed to produce measurable behavior change are becoming critical to watershed management programs. This is mainly due to an across-the-board push for higher levels of accountability and measurable results from government and private grant programs.

### Social Marketing

Social marketing works to help people change their behaviors to become healthier or to improve society or the world in some way. On the continuum of methods to bring about health and social change are the two used most often: education, which uses rational facts to persuade people to change their behaviors, and coercion, which forces people to adopt a behavior under threat of penalty for not doing so. Somewhere in between those two points lies social marketing -- the use of commercial marketing methods to persuade people to change their behaviors for reasons that go beyond the rational facts to appeal to their core values. So often, people know exactly what they should be doing and why, and they still disregard what their head tells them.

### Exchange Theory

At the center of social marketing theory is the theory of exchange. Exchange is the act of giving something and getting something in return. In a commercial marketing example, I would pay a dollar and get a can of soda. That exchange should be mutually beneficial, or it probably wouldn't have taken place.

In the world of social marketing, we ask people to give up an old behavior in favor of a new behavior of our choosing. What's in it for them? Why should they give up a practice they may understand and feel comfortable doing repeatedly?

While money is usually at the center of a commercial marketing exchange, the reason or reasons people agree to change behaviors are often not financial in nature. People might choose to take on a new action if it saves time, if it is more convenient, if it is ultimately easier to do, or if preserves the natural resources for their descendants. A major key to success in social marketing is pinpointing the exchange factor that will work for a given audience.

### Audience-Centered Approach

Social marketing approaches require detailed knowledge of targeted audiences. It is important to understand the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and practices of the segment of society who's actions will impact your success the greatest amount.

Audience research is the vehicle social marketers use to determine what an audience's barriers to change are, which exchange factors should be used, and how to package and best distribute the message.

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## The Four Ps

The marketing concepts of product, price, place and promotion are also important components of social marketing efforts.

- Product is the thing you are marketing. In commercial marketing the products are almost always tangible goods or services. In social marketing terms, the product is usually the behavior or action being promoted.
- Price is the cost of the product or service. The price in a social marketing campaign is the giving part of the exchange. What does the person give up in exchange for the benefits of the new behavior or action? The price in social marketing efforts is more often time, effort, comfort or some other non-monetary cost.
- Place is where the product or action is available or takes place. For example, if a social marketing campaign asks people to recycle their used motor oil, how convenient do the project sponsors make it for people to recycle? Do they have to drive a few blocks to a neighborhood parts store? Do they have to travel several miles to a landfill or other recycling center? If a project calls for people to pick up after their pets on public trails near the river, those trails become the place. However, part of the place is having the bags and waste receptacles conveniently located so people are more likely to do the action.
- Promotion refers to the mediums used by campaign sponsors to get the message to the target audiences. Social marketing success often hinges on determining and using the proper mix of communication channels.

## The Media Mix

Another important part of audience research is determining the most appropriate mass media channels and community-based approaches to use to get your message to the target audiences.

A great thing about social marketing campaigns is they can work on a large scale or a small scale. Regardless of whether the audience is a few people or a few million people, the most effective campaigns always use some sort of mix of mass media and community-based approaches.

## Why Should You Use Social Marketing?

- ✓ It helps you define and reach the target audiences that are key to the success of your overall watershed program.
- ✓ It helps you customize your message(s) to those targeted audiences,
- ✓ It helps you create greater and longer-lasting behavior change in those audiences.

## Who Can Do Social Marketing?

Anyone! Social marketing is not rocket science or brain surgery. Having said that, there is a great deal of knowledge and a variety of skills that are needed to successfully research, develop, implement and evaluate a behavior change initiative.

Social marketing principles can be self-taught by reading a variety of free and commercial books and publications about the craft. “Getting Your Feet Wet with Social Marketing: A Social Marketing Guide for Watershed Programs” is available as a free pdf file download from the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food’s web site: <http://www.ag.utah.gov/conservation/GettingYourFeetWet1.pdf>. Two other free publications that may help with parts of the process are available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA# 841B03002 Getting In Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns, is a guidebook that promotes a six step process to planning, conducting and implementing successful outreach campaigns. While it doesn’t go into the level of detail about behavior change social science that social marketing books do, Getting in Step is a great resource that clearly defines the outreach process. EPA# 842B01003 Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place, provides a detailed overview and training into the process of determining and employing community assets and resources, and creating and tapping into social networks as part of the watershed planning process.

For more information about social marketing or watershed outreach in general, contact Jack Wilbur. Utah Department of Agriculture and Food. (801) 538-7098. [jackwilbur@utah.gov](mailto:jackwilbur@utah.gov).